



Pakistan Deporting 89 Arab Aid Workers

Saturday, October 06, 2001

Associated Press

PESHAWAR, Pakistan — Pakistan's military regime ordered 89 Arab and other Muslims working for Islamic relief agencies deported, government and intelligence officials said Saturday.

The order appeared aimed at severing possible links to Usama bin Laden's Al Qaeda terrorist network in nearby Afghanistan. U.S. and other Western agencies have alleged that bin Laden's network uses some Islamic charities to channel money to terrorist cells.

A letter from the federal interior ministry, shown to The Associated Press by local officials, listed the individuals to be deported by name and nationalities. Most of them were from Saudi Arabia, Sudan, Egypt and Iraq.

The others were from Jordan, Somalia, Morocco, Algeria, Syria and Indonesia. All were working in Pakistan's Northwestern Frontier province along the border with Afghanistan.

One official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the letter directed provincial administration to deport the 89 immediately.

However, provincial authorities refused to implement the order immediately and instead established a committee to investigate those on the list.

The committee was expected to complete its report in about two days, Pakistani officials said on condition of anonymity. However, the officials said many Arabs living in area have already left.

The order comes amid increasing speculation of an imminent attack on Afghanistan by the United States and its allies to try to flush out bin Laden, the key suspect in the Sept. 11 airborne assaults on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon.

Pakistan became a front-line state in Washington's war on terrorism when the military regime here promised its "unstinting" cooperation.

Pakistan is the only country that still recognizes Afghanistan's Taliban government and most importantly one of the few countries with strong intelligence information on the whereabouts of bin Laden's Al Qaeda training camps.

An emergency meeting of Islamic charities, headquartered in Peshawar and operating in Afghanistan, was held behind closed doors in Peshawar earlier Saturday. The meeting held behind closed doors.

At the Sudan-based Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA) several, Bashir Ahmed, administrator, said four of the five Sudanese working for the organization have already returned to Sudan with their families.

"Everybody was being harassed," he said, without specifying by whom. "Some had been here for two years, others for one year."

The letter sent from the federal government identified the following organizations: the Saudi Red Crescent, the Kuwait based Lajnat al-D'awa Al-Islamiah, International Islamic Relief Organization, Islamic Relief Agency (ISRA), Kuwait Red Crescent, Islamic coordination Council and Kuwait Red Crescent.

There was no indication of any wrongdoing by any of these organizations.

Last week President Bush froze the assets of a number of organizations and individuals believed to be financing bin Laden's global

terrorist network.

On that list were two Pakistani-based organizations, Harakat-ul-Mujahedeen, a Kashmiri militant group and Al Rashid Trust, an Islamic charity that heavily backs the Taliban regime.

So far no reason for the order has been given and the Arab employees of the charities refused to comment when contacted.

An interior ministry spokesman said an investigation is being conducted into the credentials of all international aid workers operating in Pakistan.

"We are not discriminating against Arabs and non-Arabs," said Abdul Rashid, a spokesman for the interior ministry. "All foreigners present in Pakistan are having their documents verified."

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